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Kenya Birds

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Volume 11:1 November 2004

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Birds of the water's edge

Green Sandpiper. Usually seen feeding along the margins of streams and small dams. Note the relatively dark, unmarked upperparts and greenish legs. In flight, it shows a white tail, contrasting with the dark back and wings. The Green Sandpiper nests in Europe and Asia.

Common Snipe. Feeds in marshes, lakeshores and flooded grassland. This migrant from Europe and Asia is very similar to the resident African Snipe. However, African Snipes normally live in highland marshes. Common Snipes occur in many parts of Kenya, from coastal marshes to Rift Valley lakes, October to March. Also note the more extensive white underparts on the Common Snipe.

Western Reef Heron. A few of these herons turn up on inland lakes, very far from the reef! They are also found along the north Kenya coast. Note the long, strong, light-coloured beak, white throat, and greenish-brown legs. The Western Reef Heron also has an all-white morph.

All photos by Itai Shanni

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Welcome to Kenya Birdfinder!

Phillista Malaki, Chege Kariuki and Titus Imboma welcome you to Kenya Birdfinder. This new online database is coordinated by Nature Kenya, the Ornithology Department of the National Museums of Kenya, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB, in UK) and BirdLife International.

Kenya Birdfinder seeks to record observations of birds in the field as a source of information to help us to better understand birds and make a contribution to bird conservation. The database enables you to store and manage your own observations, extract reports and view, print or download maps and checklists of your choice.

The site is still under construction. Soon, however, you can log on to www.worldbirds.org/kenya and register your personal details to gain access to all of the site's pages and range of tools. Explore different locations around Kenya and find out what birds have been seen and when and where they were recorded. As well as contributing your own observations, you will be able to view other people's records, which may influence your next birding trip. Use the checklists to keep track of your sightings.

The records that you add to Kenya Birdfinder will help Nature Kenya to get a more comprehensive picture of what is happening with the country's birds. Simple bird lists can help to estimate abundance trends and document bird distributions. So wherever you go to record birds, your observations can now make a difference.

landscape by Nani Croze

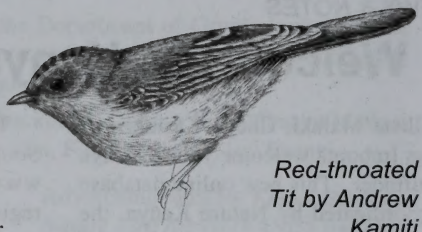
Note from the Editor

Welcome, readers, and apologies for the delay in bringing out this issue.

Thanks to all contributors for their interesting articles. If your notes or articles do not appear in this issue, look for them in the next issue!

Correction: The headline for Jasper Kirika's report on an albino Northern Black Flycatcher (in *Kenya Birds* 10) referred to Southern instead of Northern. Apologies to Kirika. *Fleur Ng'weno*

Red-throated Tit ... golfing?



Red-throated Tit by Andrew Kamiti

A cartoon on a previous Bird Committee T-shirt showed a Marabou Stork abandoning golf for bird watching. The Red-throated Tit, I think, thought otherwise – it seems quite comfortable at the Great Rift Valley Lodge & Golf Resort.

The Red-throated Tit is an East African endemic. According to Zimmerman *et al* it is found in southern Kenya to northern Tanzania between 1000m and 1600m altitude. The Great Rift Valley Lodge & Golf Resort is on the southern slopes of Eburru Crater, on the northern side of Lake Naivasha, at almost 2300m a.s.l., Lat. 0^0 40'S, Long. 36^0 19'E, Atlas Square 62c. The 18-hole golf course is about 6 years old, but the lodge is only about 3 years old. It is in the rain shadow, so the habitat is a combination of bushland, scrubland, grassland, rocks, cliff and the exotic greens. Whistling acacia and leleshwa trees and lemon grass and red oats grass dominate the landscape.

The Red-throated Tit usually feeds in the acacias with its acrobatic feeding style, opening galls and taking cocktail ant larvae. Four records of breeding have been recorded on nest cards so far, all of them completely different. Each time the tits used the nests of other birds: Red-rumped Swallows, Nubian Woodpeckers, Rufous Sparrows and Chestnut Sparrows. The tits were observed carrying soft red cedar bark and bird feathers.

I have read that the Red-throated Tit is associated with yellow-barked acacias, and that the Absyssinian Scimitarbill accompanies the tit on its daily forage, taking advantage of the galls it opens. However, in ten years' stay along the lake shore, where the yellow-barked acacia is the dominant tree, I have not come across the tit. Absyssinian Scimitarbills are very rare on this side of the lake, they are much more common in Hell's Gate National Park, where I have not seen any Red-throated Tits.

Well, I'm calling upon all naturalists, birders, conservationists, etc. in Naivasha and its environs to contribute on this issue, I know we have many and very reliable ones. We might be harbouring another endemic and unique species, along with the Grey-crested Helmet-shrike.

Another interesting record to look out for is the mysterious Northern Puffback (*Dryoscopus gambensis malzacii*) which is mainly found north of the equator, but has been recorded breeding in Loldia Ranch side by side with Black-backed Puffback despite tough competition.

James Wainaina Gathitu
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Reference: *Zimmerman, D.A., Turner, D.A., Pearson, D.J. 1996.* Birds of Kenya and Northern Tanzania. *A. & C. Black, London*

Unravelling Lesser Flamingo Mysteries

Dr Brooks Childress, Email: <Brooks.Childress@wwt.org.uk>

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Lesser Flamingos are mysterious birds. There are huge numbers of them, perhaps as many as four million, and yet their continued existence is considered threatened because they have very few breeding sites. They gather in great numbers on the alkaline lakes of the Rift Valley, creating some of the most magnificent wildlife spectacles in the world, and yet there are many things we still don't know about them.

For example, despite scientists' best efforts over many years to count the total number of Lesser Flamingos we still don't have a good estimate of how many there are. Until the early 1970s, it was thought that there were approximately four million in total, 98% of which lived on the alkaline lakes of the Rift Valley in East Africa.

The rest lived in small isolated populations in southern Africa (50,000 in Namibia/Botswana), western Africa (6,000 in Mauritania/Senegal) and on the India-Pakistan border (estimated to be 10s of thousands).

Then, in 1971, approximately one million Lesser Flamingos were counted breeding at Etosha Pan in Namibia, and in 1974, approximately 1.7 million of them were counted breeding at Sua Pan in Botswana. Where did all of these Lesser Flamingos come from?

Simultaneous declines in the numbers of Lesser Flamingos counted in East Africa suggest that perhaps the large breeding populations in southern

Africa came from there. However, although Lesser Flamingos are very nomadic, flying frequently between lakes, they are thought to make these flights mainly at night to avoid the various species of eagles that are their main avian predators. With a flight speed of only 60 km/hr, they probably couldn't cover more than 600 km in a night before having to stop over somewhere.

Since there are no logical stopover places on the 2,200 km journey from East Africa to southern Africa, it has seemed unlikely to many scientists that the large numbers of Lesser Flamingos counted breeding in southern Africa came from East Africa. Although there was some speculation that they may have taken a coastal route through Mozambique, there has been no evidence to support such a migration has ever taken place. So, perhaps there are more Lesser Flamingos in southern Africa than we thought, or there is a migration route we haven't discovered.

A coordinated census of Lesser Flamingos in East African countries in 2002 was only able to come up with approximately 2.5 million birds. Then, in October 2003, scientists counted over one million of them breeding in the Great Rann of Kachchh in Gujarat State, India, on the border with Pakistan. Previously it had been thought there were only tens of thousands there. Are there more Lesser Flamingos in India/Pakistan than we thought, or were these birds normally resident in East Africa?

We simply don't know yet, but in 2003 we discovered evidence that at least one Lesser Flamingo had migrated over 6,000 km. This flight links two populations that were previously thought to have no connection, and we have a satellite tracking study underway that we hope will shed further light on this mystery.

In 1962, the Kenyan ornithologist Leslie Brown, along with Alan Root, the wildlife cinematographer, found that Lesser Flamingos were breeding on Lake Magadi, an unusual event. Brown, Root, and several other members of the East Africa Natural History Society rounded up and ringed 8,000 juvenile Lesser Flamingos on Lake Magadi. The rings were obtained from the British Museum and the records now reside with the British Trust for Ornithology in England.

In a recent review of the recovery records from this ringing effort, we discovered that one of the Lesser Flamingos ringed by the Brown-Root group on 30 October 1962 was recovered on 28 September 1997 near Laayoune, Western Sahara. It was probably found along the shore of "Flamingo Lake", a small little-known and officially unnamed lake amongst the sand dunes near Laayoune that frequently holds large numbers of flamingos.

The direct distance between Lake Magadi in Kenya and Laayoune is reported to be 6,197 kilometres. How or when this Lesser Flamingo got from one to the other is completely unknown. However, we believe this is the first record of an interchange between the East African and western African populations.

Tracking flamingos with rings and satellites

Under the auspices of the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, and the County Councils of Baringo and Koibatek, with support from the Earthwatch Institute, University of Leicester, The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Max Planck Research Centre for Ornithology, Darwin Institute, Vodafone and others, we are tracking the movements of seven individual Lesser Flamingos with satellite transmitters.

The primary aim of this study is to understand and describe the complex movement patterns of the Lesser Flamingos, in support of the development of a future international flyway protection plan for them in eastern and southern Africa. We also hope to discover whether there are seasonal patterns to what previously has looked like random nomadic behaviour, and to be able to show whether or not there is genetic interchange between the separate populations in Africa and India, along with the routes taken, stopover places and some indication of the frequency.

Important findings already have been made in the first two years of this study, including the fact that one of the birds being followed made 130 interlake flights totalling some 12,500 km!

In a scientific paper published in March 2004 in *Ostrich*, Journal of African Ornithology, we describe the key site network used by Lesser Flamingos in East Africa, the

movements of the birds among the sites and the length of time spent at each. We also report for the first time on the importance of a large (600+ sq. km.) ephemeral wetland lake in central Tanzania. Prior to this study, none of these findings were known.

We also report the inconsistent conservation status of these important sites, and will be advocating greater protection for the unprotected sites through international collaboration. You can learn more about this study and follow the bi-weekly movement updates by logging onto: www.wwt.org.uk/flamingo.

In addition to the satellite tracking study, we are conducting two other studies designed to help us understand the movements of the Lesser Flamingos and the genetic relationships among the various populations. Both studies are part of the Earthwatch Institute's "Lakes of the Rift Valley" research programme, run by Dr. David Harper, Senior Lecturer, Department of Biology, University of Leicester (UK).

The first study is an on-going ringing programme at Lake Bogoria. It is also being conducted under the auspices of the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, and the County Councils of Baringo and Koibatek, with support from Earthwatch Institute, University of Leicester and The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust. To-date we have ringed 260 Lesser Flamingos.

Each flamingo has a Ringing Scheme of Eastern Africa metal ring placed on its right tibia and an orange plastic ring with black letter combinations placed on its left tibia for easy identification using binoculars or a telescope. Although none of these ringed birds has been reported from other lakes, several have been re-sighted at Lake Bogoria several months after having been ringed.

Ringing is important not only in documenting movements, but also in helping determine how long Lesser Flamingos live in the wild, another mystery. For example, we recently reviewed the recovery records from the Brown-Root ringing effort in 1962. We discovered that the carcass of one of the Lesser Flamingos ringed on 30 October 1962 was recovered recently deceased at Lake Bogoria on 13 July 2003 by Robert Ndetei of the Kenya Wildlife Service and John Githaiga of the Department of Zoology, University of Nairobi. When found, the bird was 40.7 years old, making it the oldest wild Lesser Flamingo known.

The second study, just getting underway, involves the comparison of genetic markers in the DNA from the different African and Indian Lesser Flamingo populations to help us determine how closely these populations are related.

Tropical and Temperate Birds

What is the difference in raising young?

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art by Andrew Kamiti

For decades, scientists have been trying to figure out why temperate and tropical bird species are so different. The complex life-history traits are of special interest, because this is where some very conspicuous differences can be found: Tropical birds are generally believed to have smaller clutches of eggs, longer developmental periods, higher nest predation rates, lower annual fecundity and longer post-fledging care than temperate ones. However, the identification of factors that cause these differences is often hampered by our insufficient knowledge about tropical species.

Our approach was to study differences in life-history traits within the warblers of the genera *Sylvia* and *Parisoma*. Recent studies of DNA-sequences in the family of the Old World Warblers, the Sylviidae, had resulted in some taxonomic changes.

The studies demonstrated that the family Sylviidae should include the Timaliinea as a subfamily. (The Timallinea, also written Timaliidae, currently includes the babblers, chatterers and illadopses.) The genus *Sylvia* should be included in this subfamily. On the other hand, leaf-warblers (*Phylloscopus*) such as Willow Warbler, and reed warblers (e.g. *Acrocephalus, Hippolais*) and other genera belong to a separate subfamily, Acrocephalinae.

Blackcap

Further, the molecular studies showed that the African genera *Pseudoalcippe* (African Hill Babbler) and *Parisoma* (the parisomas) are derived from *Sylvia* ancestors.

Therefore, *Pseudoalcippe* and *Parisoma* were subsumed within *Sylvia*, which today comprises 28 species. Among them are European birds such as Blackcap (*S. atricapilla*), Whitethroat (*S. communis*), and Garden Warbler (*S. borin*), and also the Brown Parisoma (now *Sylvia lugens*) and the Banded Parisoma (now *Sylvia boehmi*) from Kenya.

(*Editor's note:* DNA sequencing and other studies are changing some of our concepts of bird taxonomy. However, *Kenya Birds* will continue to use the names and families listed in the *Check-list of the Birds of Kenya*, third edition, published by the East Africa Natural History Society in 1996. When the list is revised, the new findings will be taken into consideration.)

The genus *Sylvia* has a high number of species, and among them are temperate resident species, tropical resident species and long-distance migrants, which experience both environments. These characteristics make *Sylvia* a good model system for the investigation of differences in life-history traits between temperate and tropical birds. However, while many of the temperate and migrating species in Europe have been studied closely, information on the tropical species is still sketchy.

The aim of our project was to get a close insight into the breeding biology of the two tropical warblers, the Brown Parisoma (now *S. lugens*) and Banded Parisoma (now *S. boehmi*). In April/May 2000, the project was initiated and suitable study sites located.

Parisoma populations of sufficient size for a study were found on Madrugada Farm, close to Nakuru, for *S. lugens* and at Olorgesailie Prehistoric Site for *S. boehmi*.

Before observations began, and in several follow-up ringing sessions, Parisomas at both sites were lured into mist-nets by playing tapes of their songs. On capture, the birds were measured and colour-banded (coloured plastic rings were placed on the birds' legs, in different combinations). That way, we could identify each individual, and thus track and monitor thirteen breeding pairs in both species. This was

done for two breeding seasons, from October 2000 to August 2002.

During the breeding season, each pair was observed daily for 30 minutes, six days a week. In the non-breeding season, pairs were only visited every second week. In the course of the study, we spent more than 3000 hours with each species and we collected four folders filled with datasheets about habitats, nests, egg clutches, development, predation, behaviour, survival and many other features of the breeding biology of the two Parisomas.

On the technical side, we used a 12V CCD-mini-finger-camera (55 x 18 mm), connected to a portable mini-TV. The camera was lifted at the tip of a 7m bamboo pole to photograph the nests of the Brown Parisoma. This allowed us to determine clutch sizes of *S. lugens*, although the nests were often inaccessible in the dense thorn thickets high in the canopies of *Acacia abyssinica* trees.

For the analysis of the data, Fred Barasa and George Eshiamwata visited the Department of Ecology at the University of Mainz, Germany, in September/October 2002. We found that the two Kenyan Parisomas are perfectly typical tropical birds, because compared to their temperate congenerics they show all the features expected.

Those are, for example, smaller clutches (almost four clutches per year with two eggs each) and long incubation and nestling periods (each lasting for two weeks or longer). Nest predation rates were high. Only one out of three nests of the Brown Parisoma yielded fledglings, and only one out of five nests in the Banded Parisoma. Among the most dangerous predators of Banded Parisoma nests were cocktail ants. These tree-living ants invaded several nests and left only skeletons of the nestlings.

For comparison, *Sylvia* species in Central Europe usually lay one or two clutches of four to five eggs per year. Incubation and nestling stage last 10 to 13 days each, and approximately one out of every two nests is successful.

Brown Parisoma

Once fledged, the young Kenyan *Sylvias* had a high chance to survive. This was facilitated by the parents, who made great efforts to help the fledglings through the first weeks of their life. The Banded Parisoma fed its offspring for more than two months, the Brown Parisoma for more than one month, and the young birds stayed in their parents' territory for weeks even after feeding had stopped. In contrast, offspring of European *Sylvia* species receive considerably less care. They are fed for only two to three weeks before they disperse.

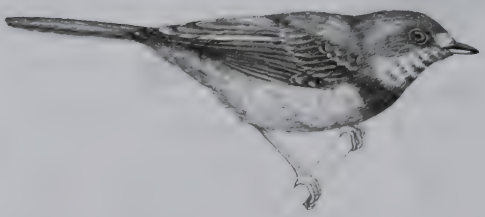
Altogether, the study of the breeding biology of the two tropical warblers was a very interesting and rewarding task, yielding many exciting results and insights into the life-history of tropical birds and the conditions under which they breed. The comparison of the Parisomas to their temperate relatives might enable a better understanding of the factors which cause the differences.

The study successfully brought together not only tropical and temperate birds, but also African and European scientists. During several months of joint fieldwork and data analysis, in Kenya and in Germany, we had a great opportunity to get to know a new culture and to form friendships.

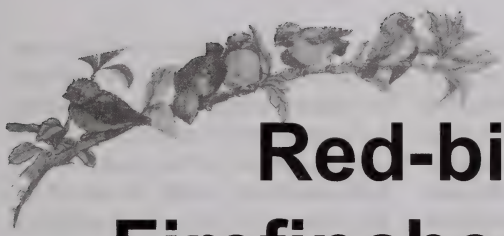
Cooperation between the Department of Ornithology at the National Museums of Kenya and the Department of Ecology at the University of Mainz was exemplary and we thank Leon Bennun and Alfred Owino as well as many others at both departments for their support. This study would never have been successful without the help of the people at our study sites. We are grateful to the owner of Madrugada Farm: Mr. Peter Barclay, his family and staff for hosting and allowing us to conduct our research on their beautiful premises. We thank Gideon Keesi, Simon Mondoi, and the entire staff of NMK´s Olorgesailie Prehistoric Site, for their hospitality and support.

The results of our study have since been published as:

Schaefer, Hans-Christian, Eshiamwata, George W., Munyekenye, Fred B. & Böhning-Gaese, Katrin (2004). Life-history of two African Sylvia warblers: low annual fecundity and long post-fledging care. Ibis 146 (3), 427-437.



Banded Parisoma



Red-billed Firefinches Share Our Bedroom

Lorraine Chittock and John Dawson
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We are lying in bed in the early morning, hardly daring to speak or move. Suddenly a Red-billed Firefinch darts into our bedroom via the bathroom window and flies up to the old weaver's nest suspended above us. The nest rocks contentedly as the chirping young consume their first meal of the day . . .

To discover how this strange situation came about, we must go back several months. Driving back from Tanzania, Lorraine had stopped by the roadside to inspect an acacia tree dripping with Grey-capped Social Weavers' nests. One lay at her feet, still attached to the branchlet that had not quite been strong enough to support the neat ball-shaped homage to the weaver's skill. She brought it back to Nairobi and attached it, twig and all, to a wooden beam across our bedroom ceiling, forming an eye-catching ornithological display alongside the feathers she had also found.

Then, just before Christmas 2000, we noticed that two Red-billed Firefinches were regularly getting 'stuck' in the bedroom, having entered through the open windows of the adjoining bathroom. We dutifully opened the louvred windows and let them out. When they then started to turn up with feathers, we finally understood. Our weaver's nest had survived the inspection procedure, and had been selected as the firefinches' conjugal home!

Now they got busy – in through the bathroom window with a small feather in their beak, a brief pause on top of the wardrobe, the short flight to the nest to tuck the feather in place, and back out through the bathroom window. Lorraine left them a container of downy feathers discarded by our three ducks, but these proud firefinches continued to bring their own.

Round about Christmas Day this busy activity came to a halt and the pair settled into continuous habitation of their home, swapping positions every hour or so. We presumed they were incubating eggs. The female took up residence for the night, and they would trade places at about seven o'clock each morning as we lay in bed, scarcely daring to breathe, waiting for the event

that would start our day as well as theirs. The male arrived at the bathroom window-sill and indicated his presence with a few sharp cheeps, to which the female would respond. With a sudden flurry he would flit into the bedroom, wings beating noisily as he hovered, almost hummingbird-like, until he decided it was safe to land on the nest. She was out, and he was in, all in a flash.

Are they sharing our space or are we sharing theirs?! It definitely feels like the latter as we creep around, using 'their' rooms as little as possible. The bedroom door is left a little ajar, the gap just sufficient to peek through in search of reassuring evidence of daytime activity. We steal to bed by candlelight, whispering in hushed tones lest we disturb our lodgers.

Thursday 4th January: A problem has occurred to us. The nest now appears very precarious, attached by a few strands of grass to a dry and friable twig that has already failed once to hold it in position. It seems to rock crazily as the parents change places, and the imminent addition of several hungry chicks could be the last straw, as it were. We gingerly tie cotton around the nest to fasten it to the twig, then construct a cotton 'cradle' securing it to the beam. Despite our care the female shoots out during the process, and an anxious hour passes with no sign of her returning. Then, through the chink in the door, we see her reappear – but as she goes into the nest, the male vacates it! Obviously, we missed his earlier rescue mission.

By the 9th of January we feel that the parents have been incubating the eggs for too long and there's no sign yet of them hatching. We worry that something has gone wrong. In order to investigate further, Lorraine transforms the area inside the mosquito net over our bed into her office, watching the firefinches daily while she works on her computer on top of the mattress/ desk. She is also trying to fix up some hides to take photos, and one of our older sheets ends up in front of the wardrobe door with a hole in it. Nature has its share of disturbances to add to ours – last night there was a fearsome storm, great zaps of lightning accompanied by thunder crashing directly overhead. Our firefinches have made a wise choice. It is amazing to think of such tiny birds nesting outside in this torrential downpour, thunder and lightning roaring around them.

12th January: Finally, the chicks have hatched! Exactly when we are not certain, but this is the first day we have heard their faint cheeps from inside the nest. Nor do we know how many there are. But we do feel like proud parents, full of vicarious happiness.

For the real parents, life takes on a very different rhythm as feeding replaces incubation. They take turns to feed the chicks, at intervals of about one hour – not as often as we expected. Nor do they spend any time in the nest, except for the minute or two when they are feeding. Even during the night, the chicks are left alone in the nest. The parents are still coming and going via the bathroom windows – it is interesting to note that the male tends to leave by one window, the female by the other!

Here is the timetable of parental visits (sex not recorded) on 15th January, from nine o'clock in the

morning until mid-afternoon:

15th January: Feeding Visits to Nest

9:00 a.m.	12:42 p.m.
9:55 a.m.	1:43 p.m.
10:50 a.m.	2:30 p.m.
11:37 a.m.	3:35 p.m.

As the chicks grow in size and become more demanding, the pace of feeding accelerates. Even by the next day – 16th January – the interval between feeding visits has shortened to about 45 minutes. In the following table, visits between mid-morning and early evening are listed. The sex of the visiting parent is noted, along with the length of time at the nest (when recorded). Many of these observations are made with Lorraine sitting concealed beneath the mosquito net in the bedroom, while John observes from the garden outside.

16th January: Feeding Visits to Nest

Time	Feeding bird	time at nest
10.27 a.m.	Female	2 min 45 sec
11.30 a.m.	Male	
12.17 p.m.	Female	
12.59 p.m.	Male	1 min 15 sec
1.38 p.m.	Female	1 min 50 sec
2.22 p.m.	Male	1 min 12 sec
3.17 p.m.	Female	1 min 17 sec
4.03 p.m.	Male	
4.37 p.m.	Female	
5.13 p.m.	Male	
5.40 p.m.	Female	

The final visit to the nest tended to occur at about 6.30 p.m.

One week after the first faint cheeps were heard, the chicks are managing to rock the nest without parental assistance. Although their chirps are still loudest during feeding visits, they are becoming increasingly vocal at other times. All in all the chicks are definitely getting bigger and noisier, and the level of parental activity is increasing in response. Instead of the male and female taking turns with the feeding, they are spending more time together in the bedroom in the vicinity of the nest. Here is the programme for the morning of 20th January:

20th January: Activity Around Nest

7.05 a.m. First meal of the day – the male goes in and out.

7.40 a.m. Female in and out

8.18 a.m. Female lands on sill, then goes off again – perhaps realising it isn't her turn!

8.27 a.m. Male and female turn up together. They both make several visits in and out, some together, some apart, as well as spending time in the branches outside the window. They are also very active in the bedroom, perching on the wardrobe, on the bed, on the bookcase, even on Lorraine's camera! They make several visits to and from the nest in the meantime. Both parents are vocal, the male in particular uttering a sharp two-note peep. They finally both leave at 8.43.

9.05 a.m. They spend about ten minutes in the branches outside the bathroom window, but don't go in. At one stage the male seems to be investigating the rather handier entrance through the bedroom window.

9.18 a.m. The male makes three or four trips to the nest.

9:20 a.m. The male spends about five minutes in restless activity, calling from various vantage points around the room, spending up to one and a half minutes in the nest, leaving and returning through the bathroom window, before finally leaving at 9.25.

9:28 a.m. The female indulges in very similar activity. She makes single loud cheeps from various perches, including the bookcase and the bathroom window. She leaves at 9.42, and flies down to our garden pond for a wash.

9.55 a.m. Over the next 10 minutes both parents engage in similar activity: entering and leaving, visiting the nest, calling from various perches around the bedroom. At one stage the male enters and perches on the wardrobe door and emits a harsh cheep, to which the chicks respond. He enters the nest for about two minutes before flying back to perch on the wardrobe for a short time before leaving.

In view of the following day's events, we wonder if any of this constant noisy parental activity serves to orient the chicks, giving them a sense of the geography of the area in preparation for their first actual experience of it.

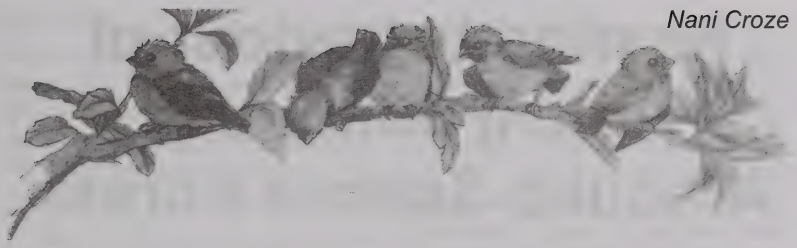
Sunday 21st January: It's been a month since we first realised that our bedroom was becoming home to a pair of Red-billed Firefinches, and now the concluding moments of the drama unfold so fast! In the morning there is quite frenzied activity, both male and female coming and going, feeding the young and flitting noisily around the room. The male, especially, is visiting several perches, making the same distinctive call he was making yesterday – a sharp two-note peep, with the second note higher than the first. We wondered yesterday if this was orienting activity, now it seems more like a summons to action!

At about 9.30 a.m., the male calls with increased agitation, and makes several flights across to the nest. Suddenly, one of the young appears! It cannot steer so well yet, and a bedroom is not exactly the best place to learn how to fly, so it bounces off a few walls before coming to rest, exhausted, on a low bookcase. The parents flutter around in a concerned manner, and eventually it contrives to escape through the louvres of the bedroom window.

Then chaos reigns as more fledglings appear from the nest in urgent need of flying lessons – there are probably three more, but it feels like a multitude as they career around the room, getting themselves stuck in impossible corners. So much for the parents' orientation programme, and so much for our plans to carefully count the offspring! We are concerned, though, that they will get stuck. Lorraine rescues one that has fallen down a gap between the wardrobe and bookcase. Somehow, the parents manage to shepherd their youngsters out through the bathroom window.

They soon make their way across to the safety of a nearby hedge, and there seems to be firefinches everywhere, as though several more have turned up to see what is going on. To our amazement, another visitor suddenly appears on the scene – a single Village Indigobird, a species which parisitises the Red-billed Firefinch. Perhaps it was wondering if it was parent to any of these offspring! We are fairly sure, however, that the entire brood are the genuine article.

But the matter did not end there. Leaving the airborne chicks safely concealed inside the hedge, the parents head back to the bedroom. Another



chick has appeared from the nest, and another! These are the runt end of the litter, and they have even more trouble than their siblings negotiating the numerous obstacles that obstruct their maiden flight. They crash into walls and hang on desperately to picture frames and curtains before yet another chick drops dangerously down behind the wardrobe. Boxes and junk are wrestled out of the way and a dust-covered chick emerges to be carried to the open window by Lorraine. A little later the male flies into the bedroom again, as if to check that there are no more. The whole flurry of activity has lasted maybe two hours.

Throughout the afternoon the parents ferry food to their five or six youngsters hidden deep in the hedge, without so much as a backward glance to the nest that was their home. It's true what they say about the small things in life making the difference. Firefinches are *very* small. And they made a huge difference. In one of many moments of sentimentality, Lorraine hopes they'll come back to spend one last night in the nest, though given the obstacles in the room, we don't think they should. And they don't. So no little cheeps the next morning. But in the course of the next week, both the male and the female return to the bathroom window and chirp a few times just to make sure that no one has been left behind.

A few weeks later, in preparation for our upcoming move to another house, we take down the nest and empty out the contents. There are a LOT of bird droppings, understandably when you think of so many birds in a confined space for so long. And the feathers! No less than 112 downy feathers! Most are white feathers from our three ducks, so they did not have to travel far to find bedding material. Even so, at one feather per trip, that's a lot of trips to furnish a house.

At our new home, we have hung the emptied nest just outside the bedroom window in the hope that a second family of firefinches will make use of it. Or perhaps another couple that has need of a love nest. A month later, it still remains empty. But Lorraine has opened up the doors of an atrium that hasn't been used in years, thinking it has tons of potential. The Red-billed Firefinches here seem to think so too, and a pair has started nesting in its thatched eaves. Lorraine placed the 112 feathers from the last nest nearby, and this time the firefinches are taking advantage of the easy furnishings to line their nest. Once again, we'll be watching and waiting!

Nesting behaviour of Amani Sunbird in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest

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Introduction

The Amani Sunbird is globally and regionally vulnerable[1,3]. This bird is an endemic resident in southeastern coastal Kenya—in Brachystegia woodland within the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest—and in and near the East Usambara mountains and Udzungwa scarp[4] in northeastern Tanzania.

Survey data and sight records have been useful in determining the conservation status of the Amani Sunbird[1, 2,5,6]. However, some information on the natural history of this bird is still missing. In this note, we give additional information on the nesting behaviour of the Amani Sunbird (see also[4]).

We spent four months at the beginning of 2002 conducting research on sunbird foraging activities within the Brachystegia woodland of the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest in Coast Province. During this period, we followed and observed the feeding behavior of Amani Sunbirds and other sunbirds species in the forest. We were fortunate to document the nesting behavior of a pair of Amani Sunbirds.

Our observations were made between March 14 and April 9, 2002, and the site was located at 03^0 19'17" S and 039^{0}55'22" E. For two weeks following April 9, we did not see any activities at the nest and assumed the young had fledged. We climbed the tree and brought the nest down for detailed descriptions and pictures. The nest is deposited in the Ornithology Department of the National Museums of Kenya.

Nest building

Nest-building took about one week. We observed the female constructing the hanging nest, using lichens collected on the same tree or from nearby trees. During nest construction, the male would perch on a nearby branch, turning his head frequently

(probably making vigilant observations) and sometimes making sharp calls. The pair would both leave the tree and return after few minutes, the female carrying lichens in her bill. This was repeated frequently until completion of the nest.

The following week and a half passed with only one observation of the pair sitting on a branch next to the nest. From April 2 – April 9, both male and female were seen actively carrying food into the nest at regular intervals. They both left and returned together with food in the bill, and entered the nest in turn. We made no observation of incubation by either sex.

Amani sunbird male by Andrew Kamiti

Nest description

The nest was hanging from the branch of a *Brachystegia spiciformis* tree, 15m from the ground. The area around the nest was crowded with lichens, making the nest difficult to see.

The Amani Sunbirds constructed a round, compact nest of lichen, with a side entrance. Below the nest were trails of other hanging lichen, and the inside was neatly lined with pappus hairs. The nest weighed 7. 0 g. The diameter of the "door" was 62.1mm (external) and 31.1 mm (internal). Maximum dorsal length (from the upper side of the nest door to the back of the nest) was 85.6mm, and maximum ventral length (from the lower side of the nest door to the back of the nest) measured 68.8 mm.

Acknowledgements

These observations were made during research that was supported by the Wildlife Conservation Society and Provost Research Award (University of Illinois at Chicago).

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Collared Pratincole Nesting in Amboseli N.P.

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The Collared Pratincole, also called Red-winged or Common Pratincole, is a migratory species in the Glareolidae family. Its preferred habitat is largely sandbanks, floodplains, and alkaline flats. In Amboseli National Park, one can find pratincoles feeding in large flocks of scores to several hundreds in the dry swamps as well as over open waters, or on flat open ground.

Pratincoles are as graceful as terns. Their principal diet consists of insects caught in the air over water or land. They may also chase prey with fast runs on the ground. Aerial feeding is aided by their graceful flight on long and pointed wings and a wide gape, like nightjars or swallows. This wide gape is presumably to facilitate the catching of insects on the wing, as described by del Hoyo et al in *Handbook of the Birds of the World*. Their flights is buoyant and free, with deep wing beats and periods of agile gliding, and this allows them to exploit flying insects.

We were in Amboseli National Park for two weeks in December 2001, carrying out a survey on bird abundance and diversity in the five main habitat types, to compare with the one Jeff Walters did in the mid 1970's. Much of Amboseli's habitats have been changing structurally, especially the woodlands. The impact of elephants has been very influential and has "driven" woodlands towards the outside of the national park. This change in habitat structure has had impacts on bird communities that are yet to be understood.

On 9 December, while driving along Lake Kioko, we saw a Collared Pratincole fly up from the middle of the road ahead of us. When we again flushed the bird the next day, we stopped and investigated. We could not believe it! The bird had two eggs on a nest scraped out in the middle of the road. The eggs' colour was mottled black, beige and light brown-grey, and measured about 2x3 centimetres. A few rocks of volcanic origin surrounded the nest and some grass of *Sporobolus spicatus* was the only vegetation around. The eggs were well camouflaged on the ground, were it not for the bird being in the middle of the road, no one would notice them. Such cryptic colouration is a survival strategy for many ground-nesting birds.

We passed this route several more times, but could not find the nest again despite our efforts to locate it using a hand-held Geographic Positioning System reading. There were no broken eggshells to suggest either hatching or predation. We thought that the birds

might carry away the eggshells after hatching to distract would-be predators from the newly hatched and helpless chicks. On the 15th, we could not even see any adult pratincoles around.

On the 20th, a flock of adults were feeding and we searched for any young among them – and there it was, motionless and camouflaged on the ground. Calling very much like the adults, it could not fly, but walked very fast on the ground. According to the literature, the young birds leave the nest 2-3 days after hatching, are fed by both adults for up to 7 days and fledge in 25-30 days. The chick we were observing was likely to be about 10 days old and still far from fledging.

del Hoyo et al (1996) describe the Collared Pratincole population as declining, at least in Europe, through loss of suitable habitat. The dramatic change in water-management programmes in its African wintering quarters is also affecting its original habitat. Here, south of the Sahara, the Collared Pratincole is an Afrotropical migrant, and is also affected by habitat loss and human activities. The only disturbance in Amboseli, however, are the tourists and other vehicles frequenting the park when a pratincole 'decides' to nest in the middle of the road, and perhaps natural predators.

Other breeding records during this survey included: a juvenile Martial Eagle soaring over a *Suaeda monoica* bushland near the park headquarters, four records of young Kittlitz's Plover feeding in the alkaline grassland plains, Slender-tailed Nightjar with a young, a Hoopoe carrying food in the Ol Tukai Lodge compound, and a Two-banded Courser with a newly-hatched chick in the acacia savanna west of the park.

Acknowledgements: The Amboseli Bird Survey was kindly supported by the African Conservation Centre through funding from the Wildlife Conservation Society. We are greatly indebted to Dr David Western of African Conservation Centre who organised this survey and the Department of Ornithology at the National Museums of Kenya for all assistance and inputs. We also owe thanks to the Kenya Wildlife Service for providing permission and free entrance to the park, and to David Maitumo for immense assistance during the two week survey.

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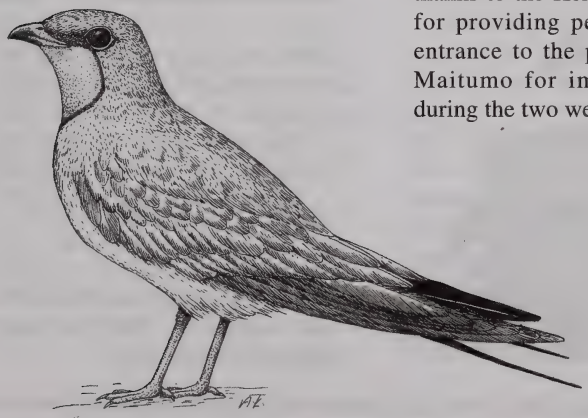


Collared Pratincole by Andrew Kamiti

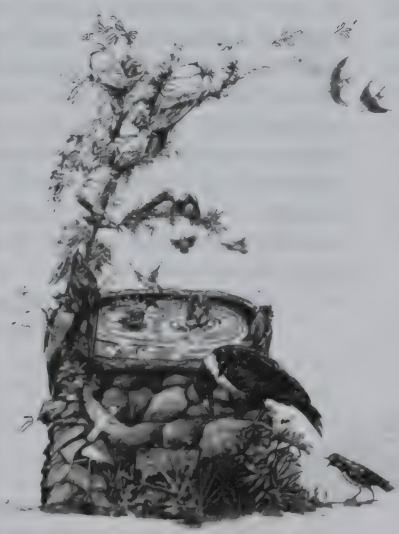
Attracti

to your home, office

by Fleur Ng'weno <fle
art by Nani Croze

There are several ways to attract birds to your home, office or school compound:

Water. Providing water is probably the simplest and most effective method. Seed-eating birds such as doves and firefinches need to drink. Many insect-eating birds, who get enough water from their food, enjoy a bath.



• Use a dish, a plate, or a shallow basin. Birds feel safer if the water is shallow. If your birdbath is deep in the middle, add a stone or two for the birds to perch on. A birdbath can be made of pottery, stone or various other materials. If you use a metal *karai*, remember to put it in the shade.

• Cats are important predators on birds, so keep your birdbath out of cat's reach. That means placing it high enough, or surrounding it with thorny branches – or having a dog to keep cats away. In town, the dish of water may fit on a windowsill or verandah. In a big compound, it can placed on a pile of rocks, on top of a large tin or barrel, or on a flat piece of wood nailed to a tree. You can also build a "table", high enough so cats cannot jump on it.

• Pour fresh water in the dish every 1 or 2 days, and throw the old water out. This prevents mosquitoes breeding.

g Birds

r school compound

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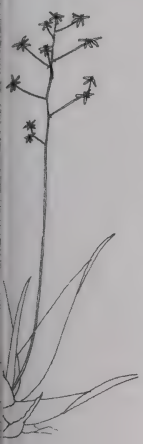

• Be patient; the birds may take some time to discover the water.

Food. Birds will also come for food. The menu you offer depends on your budget and imagination! Spread the food out on a wooden "bird-table" (out of cat's reach) or place it onto the branches of a tree.

After eating mangoes or papayas, I hang the skins on the small tree near the birdbath, for fruit-eating birds. A friend keeps termites from rainy season swarms in the freezer to add protein value to the bird-table. Millet and sunflower seeds are available in many supermarkets and grocery stores in Kenya, and are popular with seed-eating birds.

You can also provide scraps of bread, biscuit crumbs or other leftovers. However, these have the disadvantage of attracting rodents and insects.

When you put out fresh food, throw away any food the birds have not eaten.

Birdhouses. Birdhouses are used in many countries to encourage the breeding of particular hole-nesting

birds. Does anyone have information about birdhouses designed for Kenyan birds?

Plantings. The best method to attract birds, naturally, is to create an attractive habitat. Flowers for sunbirds, bushes to hide in, water to drink and bathe, fruiting trees, a steep bank for bee-eater nests, dead trees for woodpeckers, and so on.

At Nature Kenya we are often asked what plants are most attractive to birds. We can suggest fig and olive trees for fruit-eaters, aloes for sunbirds, acacias for many small insect-feeding birds, and indigenous plants generally, but we do not have a comprehensive list.

We would appreciate hearing from our readers for a future article on "Plants for Birds".

Ringing at Ngulia, 2003

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In 1969 Ngulia Safari Lodge (Tsavo West) was discovered to be a unique site for Palaearctic bird migration. Large numbers of southward-bound night-migrating birds are attracted to the game-viewing lights under misty conditions in November, December and January. The Ngulia Ringing Group has operated there ever since. The birds are caught in fine-mesh nets, gently removed, measured and weighed, fitted with a light aluminium ring on one leg, and released to continue their migration.

Ringing controls & recoveries

The only movements involving 2003 were all Marsh Warblers:

31.07.01 Pavlov, Czech Republic
24.11.03 Ngulia

05.08.02 Skåne, Sweden
04.12.03 Ngulia

24.07.03 Niedersachsen, Germany
30.11.03 Ngulia

30.11.03 Ngulia
18.01.04 Kalomo, Zambia

21.12.03 Ngulia
21.06.04 Chadiza, Zambia

The season started slowly with little mist, but eventually produced an excellent catch of 19,160 Palaearctic migrants. The late November new moon coincided with the migration peak, and this main session of 22 nights from 16 November provided the bulk (83%) of the birds. Birds were caught close to the lodge at night, and in three lines of nets (c. 250 m) in the bush in front of the lodge by day. Playing tapes of bird songs to attract migrants was only used after 01:30 when mist failed to develop. Night netting accounted for 38% of the season's catch, a welcome increase over the previous two years (2002: 17%, 2001: 24%).

The 2003 season

Fewer than 800 migrants were ringed the first week because of unsuitable weather. Then on November 23rd, three night nets caught 379 migrants in 2h, followed by a morning bush catch of 604. Almost two-thirds were Common Whitethroats; 43 Willow Warblers, five Upcher's and two Reed Warblers were noteworthy, but so too was an absence of River Warblers. A similar pattern next day produced some 500 birds, including all three species of wheatear. The weather changed to frequent and heavy downpours until 02:00 on the 25th, and four night nets, operating from 01:00 whenever the showers eased, produced over 400 birds. The bush catch brought the day's total to 971.

Peak period

Classical Ngulia misty weather occurred on the night of 25/26th and 1149 migrants were ringed, including 516 Sprossers, 10 Eurasian Nightjars, a Eurasian Scops Owl and 15 Eurasian Rollers. With thousands of birds grounded at dawn it was not possible to open all the bush nets.

Catching continued until mid-morning and resumed after lunch. Over

1700 migrants from the bush had been ringed by dusk.

This was a day of great variety, with a record 28 Palaearctic species ringed. Especially noteworthy were 1128 Sprossers, 904 Marsh Warblers, 113 Red-backed Shrikes, 69 Iranias, 47 River Warblers (at last!), 33 Spotted Flycatchers, 26 Olive-tree Warblers and 17 Nightingales.

High mist the next night (27th) provided a welcome rest with just 380 birds ringed, including a record 28 House Martins, lured by tapes during the day. That evening, low cloud appeared by 22:00 and three nets up before midnight caught 300 birds within an hour! Light rain intervened, but afterwards catching continued steadily with two nets from 01:30. The bush catch, without using the middle net line, brought the day's Palaearctic total to 3029, only the third time the "3-k" mark has been passed at Ngulia.

Migrants remained in large numbers all day, and a singing Chiffchaff was only the second ever recorded (the first had been ringed in early December 1988). Iranias (183), Olive-tree Warblers (40) and Willow Warblers (50) were caught in exceptional numbers, and 25 Olivaceous Warblers represented a new daily record.

Third week

The third week saw action on every day but the last. On 1 December, with the mist already down, birds began to appear from midnight with the setting moon. Notable among the 1672 birds ringed this day were 23 Olive-tree Warblers (exceptional for December), 13 Basra Reed and two Great Reed Warblers. Over 1000 migrants were ringed on each of the next three days: there were over 400 Sprossers on 2nd, while 4th produced 11 more Basra Reeds and Barn Swallows appeared in numbers. The 5th was quieter but nevertheless included an Asian Lesser Cuckoo.

Final session

From 20 to 30 December four nights (21st–24th) of mist and intermittent showers allowed large catches, totalling nearly 3000 ringed. Marsh Warblers and Whitethroats predominated but there were many Iranias (134 on 23rd), Willow Warblers (37 on 23rd), River Warblers and Sprossers too, while variety was provided by several Barred, Garden and Basra Reed Warblers, Nightingales, Red-tailed Shrikes, a few more Olivaceous, Upcher's and Sedge Warblers and two Great Reeds.

Good year for variety

The overall catch this year was pleasantly varied; Marsh Warbler was less dominant and the Whitethroat catch was the highest since 1995. Totals for Willow Warbler, Irania, Red-backed Shrike, Olive-tree and Olivaceous Warbler were high, and the 53 House Martins ringed is a new annual record. There were no species additions to the Palaearctic ringing list but Red-throated Pipit (20 November) and Wryneck (1 December) were ringed for only the second time. However, two new subspecies were caught: an Olivaceous Warbler of the nominate Nile Valley race (24 November) and a Red-tailed Shrike of the Chinese race *arenarius* (1 December).

Afrotropical species

Although only 369 individuals of 65 species were ringed, four species were not only new for the ringing list but also new for Ngulia! Pride of place goes to the Mangrove Kingfisher caught at dawn on 1 December—probably the first for Tsavo West. Tambourine Dove, Ring-necked Dove and Grey-headed Silverbill were also new. African nightjar numbers were good (61 of four species) but only 13 Harlequin Quail were ringed.

Acknowledgements

We thank KWS for allowing us to ring birds in Tsavo. Sarah Tomno and staff have our thanks for their friendship and superb hospitality. The Wetland Trust, Nairobi RG and Nature Kenya provided much appreciated financial support. The Swedish Ringing Office allowed us to use their rings (14th year) and also provided their normal efficient level of support.

SHORT NOTES

Helmet-shrike "Gunships" at Galla Camp

While visiting Galla Camp in Tsavo West, we rescued a tortoise stuck in the mud of a dried up seasonal water hole below the Camp, at the northwest end of Kivuko Hill (Lat. 3° 47' S Lon. 38° 52' E) on Sunday 20th April 2003. Having released the tortoise into the bush we had just reached our car when a large adult Brown Snake Eagle flew down and perched on a nearby dead tree.

No sooner had the eagle taken up its observation of the surrounding area than it came under sustained attack from a number of different species of birds, including Fischer's Starlings and Common Drongos. First the small ones began mobbing it, then the heavy artillery arrived. About 10 White-crested Helmet-shrikes flew in, perched on another dead branch and began their assault on the hapless eagle.

Their attack method was just like the television pictures of helicopter gunships during the Iraq conflict or the aptly named Harrier jump-jets in the Falklands War. They flew off their perch and lined themselves up behind the eagle and swooped down on the bird. Half a metre from its head they momentarily stalled their dive (to lock their radar on to the target no doubt!), and then continued crashing into the eagle's head, ruffling its head feathers, and flying away back to their perch (to re-arm?).

A few seconds later the next helmet–shrike started its bombing run and repeated the attack in the same manner. This continued for about 10 minutes until the eagle flew off to the top of a tree further away, but this did not stop the attacks as we were able to see other birds mobbing it again.

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News from the Important Bird Areas

Nature Kenya, together with the National Museums of Kenya and other partners, identified 60 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Kenya. These sites are important for bird conservation, but by their very nature, also protect other living things – the biodiversity on which human survival depends.

Many IBAs are already protected areas: for example; Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, which shelters six globally threatened bird species; or Lake Nakuru with vast numbers of flamingos and other waterbirds. Other Important Bird Areas, such as the densely populated valleys where the Kenya endemic Hinde's Babbler lives, are still unprotected. More information on IBAs can be found in the book Important Bird Areas in Kenya, by Leon Bennun and Peter Njoroge, available at Nature Kenya.

Monitoring IBAs

In the past year, a system of monitoring Important Bird Areas has been developed by Nature Kenya and implemented by Government agencies and local communities, thanks to funding by the Darwin Initiative of the UK, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and BirdLife International. Monitoring is a vital part of taking action for the conservation of IBAs: it provides an early warning of emerging problems and helps to assess the effectiveness of conservation measures.

The Kenya monitoring framework looks at the habitat, existing management practices, birds and other taxonomic groups to evaluate the condition of the site. The information is collected by local communities, Government officers, Nature Kenya members and other visitors. It is then fed into the IBA computer database at the Ornithology Department of the National Museums of Kenya by Nature Kenya Research Fellows based at the Department.

A report on the monitoring process and results was launched in August 2004 by Professor Ratemo Michieka, the Director General of the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), representing Professor Wangari Maathai (the Assistant Minister for Environment and 2004 Nobel Peace Prize Winner).

The report, "Kenya's Important Bird Areas, Status and Trends, 2004" details the state, or condition, of the sites. It also lists the pressures impacting on the IBAs, and the response, or conservation actions, taken by local communities, Government institutions and non-government organisations.

This information can now be used by managers to better manage protected sites, and by local communities to guide their efforts on the ground. The report can also be used to report on Kenya's obligations under international agreements, in particular the Convention on Biological Diversity. The report is available from Nature Kenya.

Site Support Groups take action for IBAs

Friends of Kinangop Plateau (FoKP)

The friends of Kinangop Plateau (FoKP) are active in the conservation of the Kinangop Highland grasslands. FoKP has some 200 members distributed across two branches in the North (Murungaru and Engineer) and two in the South (Njambini and Magumu/Nyakia).

FoKP collaborates with KENVO of Kikuyu Escarpment to implement a project funded by the European Union's Biodiversity Conservation Programme to improve local community awareness and livelihoods via income generating activities. The group also has a well-established monitoring scheme.

Kakamega Environmental Education Programme

The Kakamega Environmental Education Programme (KEEP) hosts over 400 children every week at the environmental education centre equipped by Nature Kenya with support from the Global Environment Facility/UN Development Programme Small Grants. KEEP has also established a mobile education unit to visit schools. The butterfly exhibit has started producing pupae now sold to overseas markets via Kipepeo. Local farmers are producing pupae and beginning to earn some income from the forest. KEEP has planted over 10,000 seedlings and liaises with the Forest Department to raise more seedlings.

Kakamega Biodiversity and Conservation Group has changed name to Kakamega Guides Association (KAFOGA). In collaboration with the BIOTA biodiversity research component of the Institute of Zoology, Department of Ecology, of the University of Mainz (Germany). Nature Kenya will promote detailed monitoring in Kakamega Forest by KEEP and KAFOGA.

Kijabe Environment Volunteers

At the Kikuyu Escarpment forests, Kijabe Environment Volunteers (KENVO) have come of age and are implementing conservation initiatives ranging from tree planting, income generating activities and cultural dancing with an environmental message, to policing and monitoring the Kereita Forest. KENVO has established linkages with the private sector, as exemplified by recent funding by Carbacid Ltd to plant some 10,000 seedlings. KENVO won a bronze medal in the Total Eco-challenge 10 million trees competition, for greening degraded sites within Kereita Forest with indigenous trees.

An umbrella association for forest user groups, Kereita Forest and Wildlife Conservation Association, was established with key input from KENVO. The association is expected to enter into agreements with the Forest Department for Participatory Forest Management under the proposed Forests Bill, 2004.

Mt Kenya Biodiversity Conservation Group

On the western slopes of Mount Kenya, the Eco-Resource Centre (ERC) continues to take shape. Construction work started in July 2003 and so far the shell has been completed, with the assistance of a GEF/UNDP Small Grant. Support is still needed to engage a site manager and set up a Nature Kenya regional office with full Nature Kenya functions.

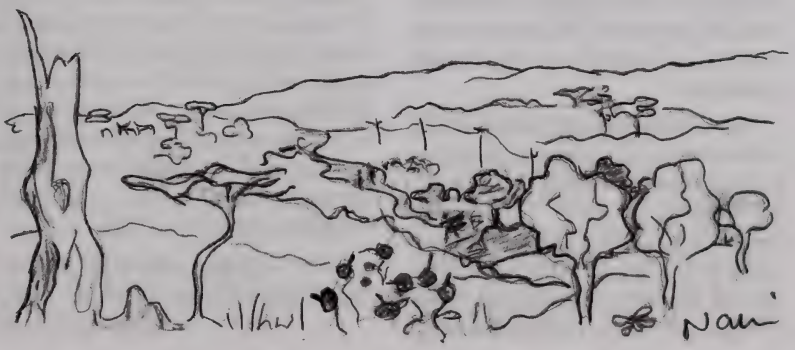
The Mt Kenya Biodiversity Conservation Group has embarked on a cultural and environmental program involving local schools, Nairobi based schools and community-based conservation organisations. Summit Ventures has become the group's business arm.

Mukurwe-ini Environment Volunteers

Mukurwe-ini Environment Volunteers (MEVO) have initiated a process to rehabilitate the Hinde's Babbler habitat by planting trees along river valleys. Some 1000 seedlings of Cordia africana have been potted, and priority for planting will be given to farmers who still host Hinde's Babbler in their farms to encourage farmers to keep a habitat suitable for the species. John Chege, the Nature Kenya intern, is a member of the Divisional Environment Committee.

South Nandi Biodiversity Conservation Group

South Nandi is a beautiful forest that deserves more concern and visitation than the current levels. Joel Siele, the Nature Kenya intern, has been very active in building the capacity of the South Nandi Biodiversity Conservation Group (SONABiC). SONABiC has raised some 4000 tree seedlings and is working with the Forest Department to develop a campsite in South Nandi that may generate some income for the local community.



Focus on Arabuko-Sokoke Forest

Two major projects co-ordinated by Nature Kenya aim at improving community livelihoods while enhancing the conservation of this unique forest.

Kindernothilfe (KNH) and NABU (German BirdLife Partner) Project

The water component on the southern edge of Arabuko-Sokoke Forest is underway. Local community consultations, mobilisation and training for established water user associations have taken place. The water piping lines have been surveyed and cleared and the National Water Department of the Ministry of Water is drawing up ground plans. Soon the local community will be enjoying piped water, and this is expected to reduce movements in and out of the forest in search of fresh water.

The community water user association SONGEA has built forest conservation into their objectives, and it has been made clear that the success of the project (and therefore the investment) is measured on the basis of improved forest quality. However, there are still many challenges in the process of involving the local community.

The eco-tourism component is co-ordinated by Anastacia Mwaura. Activities include training local guides; developing guiding operational guidelines; marketing Arabuko-Sokoke forest to the hotels, and improving services and safety in the forest. Three new groups – Mida Giriama Dancing Group, Mida Creek Conservation and Awareness Group and the Kilifi Branch of the Arabuko Sokoke Forest Guides Association (ASFGA) have been established. Two existing groups – Singwaya Cultural Group based in Roka and Sabaki Conservation Group – are going through a strengthening and consolidation programme.

Arabuko Sokoke Project, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

Based on aspects the Strategic Forest Management Plan for Arabuko-Sokoke, this project is implemented in collaboration with four Government institutions – Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI), Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), Forest Department (FD) and National Museums of Kenya (NMK). Washington Ayiemba, formerly manager of Kipepeo, is managing the project.

The pilot Participatory Forest Management (PFM) process at the Dida section of the forest is now being concluded. The results are being taken up by the Forest Department for replication at other two areas of the forest. Monitoring of birds and habitat in Arabuko-Sokoke is ongoing and sample plots have been surveyed. Domestic wood lots are now being established for the 10,000 seedlings to be planted outside the forest. It is estimated that some 40 hectares of wood lots around the forest will help reduce pressure on the forest since alternative timber and fuel wood would be availed outside the forest.

Reported by Paul Matiku, Anthony Kiragu and Fleur Ng'weno, Nature Kenya

Inaugural Waterbird Ringing Course for Africa at Watamu

Wanyoike Wamiti, Bernard Amakobe and Titus Imboma
Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya
< kbirds@africaonline.co.ke>

Introduction

The Nairobi Ringing Group (NbiRG) was honoured to host and participate in the first AFRING (African Waterbird Ringing Scheme) course, held at A Rocha Kenya's Mwamba Bird Observatory and Field Study Centre in Watamu, on the north Kenya coast, from 19-26th September 2004.

Many waterbirds are migratory, moving between water bodies, and in many cases, between continents. By catching, measuring, ringing and releasing waterbirds, we are able to learn about their movements and life histories. This information can later be used to support their conservation.

The course, sponsored by the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA), focused on East Africa first, as our ringing scheme is relatively well established. The Ghanaian delegates, members of the Ghana Ringing Scheme, shared ideas and information from their wader ringing experiences in Ghana. Doug Harebottle, AFRING coordinator, coordinated the course. Training was provided by Colin Jackson (Director, A Rocha Kenya), Dieter Oschadleus (from SAFRING) and Doug Harebottle.

The African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA)

The Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds, better known as AEWA, is part of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals signed on June 23 1979 in Bonn, Germany. This convention is also called the Bonn Convention or CMS. The Agreement encourages international co-operation action to conserve migratory waterbird species, and identified the need to set up waterbird ringing programmes throughout Africa. The implementation of this Priority has been assigned to AFRING (African Waterbird Ringing Scheme), based at the Avian Demography Unit, University of Cape Town in South Africa.

Experiences, exposure and training

The eight trainee delegates were Clamsen Thade (Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute), Sigawa Mgassi (Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania), Hamlet Mugabe (Wildlife

Conservation Society, Uganda), Alfred N. Ali (Ghana Wildlife Conservation Society), Samuel Kofi Nyame (SNV Netherlands Development Organisation, Ghana), and the three of us representing Kenya. Three additional volunteers were based at the site during the training: Simon Valle (University of Rome, Italy), Donall Cross (Fermanagh, Ireland) and Stefan Addler (NABU, Germany).

The participants had a wide range of bird ringing exposure and experiences, which offered a wonderful opportunity to share skills and knowledge. The course started with theoretical sessions on the ethics and responsibilities of being a bird ringer but also included discussions on catching techniques, mapping, and how to analyse and disseminate ringing information. Most of the practical training was done in the field at two wetland sites, Mida Creek and Lake Chem-Chem.

We practiced setting up fine nets for catching waders, extracting the birds with extreme care and keeping them briefly until they could be ringed. We gained experience in identification, ageing, and sexing (where possible) the birds, placement and closing of steel rings, taking various biometrics (such as wing, tarsus, head, bill and weight measurements), recording moult, and accuracy in data recording. We also assessed the importance of reconnaissance visits – time spent in reconnaissance is never wasted!

The study sites

Three nights, till dawn, were spent at Mida Creek, to catch and ring coastal waders. Mida Creek is a beautiful tidal inlet south of Watamu, fringed with mixed-mangrove forest. It is one of Kenya's 60 Important Bird Areas (IBA) and an important site for waterbird conservation internationally, with many thousands of migrant birds spending their non-breeding season there. This IBA is adjacent to other biologically important sites: Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, Gede Ruins, and Africa's first marine national park – Malindi-Watamu Marine National Park and Whale Island. A Rocha Kenya, a Christian conservation organization, has been involved in the establishment of a suspended boardwalk through the mangrove forest, proceeds from which raises funds to support the Arabuko-Sokoke Schools and Eco-tourism Scheme, ASSETS.

One session, from dawn, was spent at Lake Chem-Chem for freshwater species. The unprotected Lake Chem-Chem, north of Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, may have formed as an ox-bow lake from the Sabaki River. Maize farms now cover the hill slopes surrounding this freshwater wetland. Waterbirds on the lake are counted each year as part of the African Waterbird Census. We had only one morning session there, but it gave us a taste of how ringing techniques and planning can change depending on the habitat type. We also practiced catching and ringing small birds for three mornings around Mwamba Field Study Centre. The following are bird highlights from each study site.

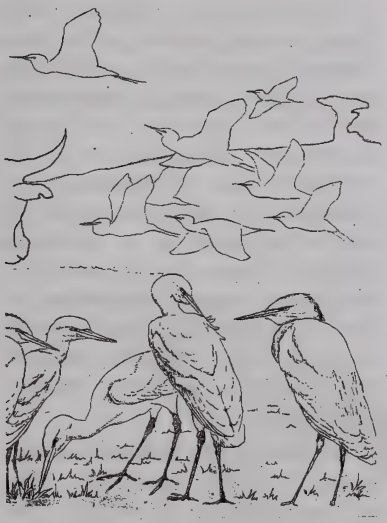
Mida Creek: Crab Plover, Ringed Plover, Lesser (Mongolian) Sandplover, Greater Sandplover, Grey Plover, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper,

Sanderling, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Common Greenshank, Terek Sandpiper.

Lake Chem-Chem: Ringed Plover, Kittlitz's Plover, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper.

The way ahead

As a ringing group, it is our responsibility to see that the skills we gained are put into action, and we look forward to more waterbird ringing in Kenya. AFRING have already identified target species, including intra-African migrants such as Sacred Ibis, Cattle Egret, Greater and Lesser Flamingos and Great White Pelican. For example, in South Africa, they are colour-marking individual birds which can then easily be seen and reported, to help to understand their movements.



Cattle Egrets by Nani Croze

So do not assume that the flock of Cattle Egrets you usually see are always the same, take a few minutes and see if they have coloured rings on their legs!

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) who set up this project and provided the funding for the course. The Highlands Ringing Group, in northern Scotland, also made a financial contribution; we are grateful for their backing and hope to continue to involve them. We are very thankful to A Rocha Kenya for providing the venue, accommodation, meals and other logistics, and especially to Colin Jackson for taking the time to be with us for the entire week, and for generously sharing his wealth of knowledge about bird ringing. The entire staff at Mwamba was very hospitable, and our fellow delegates created a friendly atmosphere. We thank the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Nairobi Ringing Group who provided funds through the National Museums of Kenya's Department of Ornithology for our transport, and the many other people who assisted in one way or the other. The course organisers deserve a big thank you for making a complex subject so enthralling.

For details on the numbers of birds caught at Mida, Chem-Chem and Mwamba during each session and a photo summary of the course, please visit the following website, courtesy of AFRING: http://www.uct.ac.za/depts/stats/adu/safring/kenya2004.htm

Summary of the workshop

Vulture Conservation in the Masai Mara National Reserve, Kenya

Edited by Munir Z. Virani and Muchane Muchai
<munir.virani@bigfoot.com> *<muchai@africaonline.co.ke>*
Art by Nani Croze

In the last decade, there has been a catastrophic collapse in populations of vultures of the genus Gyps in south Asia. Research revealed that the pharmaceutical diclofenac sodium, used as a medicine for cattle, is the primary cause of the extirpation of these populations. When vultures in south Asia fed on cattle carcasses, the chemicals accumulated inside them, causing thousands of Gyps vultures to die.

In view of these findings, the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, in collaboration with The Peregrine Fund, organised a workshop on vulture research and conservation at the Fig Tree Camp, Mara National Reserve on 23rd June 2004.

The aim was to develop an action plan to monitor vultures in the Mara National Reserve and its environs, as part of efforts to keep their populations stable and healthy for future generations. The purpose of the workshop was to maintain the ecological and biological integrity of vulture populations in the Mara National Reserve and its environs. Participants comprised stakeholders of the Masai Mara National Reserve, including lodge managers, wardens, and representatives of surrounding group ranches.

The workshop was divided into two sessions. The first comprised a series of presentations by experts that highlighted the lethal effects of

diclofenac sodium on vulture populations in south Asia through contaminated livestock carcasses. This session also introduced the important role that vultures play in the East African savannahs, the threats facing them and how veterinary and diagnostic investigations can play a crucial role in understanding how these threats can be alleviated.

In the second session, participants were divided into two groups. Group I discussed and formulated strategies to combat threats faced by vultures and how to create awareness. Group II addressed aspects related to research and monitoring of vultures. There was general consensus amongst the participants that more work needs to be done on vultures in the Mara to achieve conservation goals.

The workshop culminated in the drafting and approval of a "Mara Vulture Workshop Resolution" that recognised the global importance of the Mara ecosystem as a world heritage site and as a home for vast numbers of vultures that are threatened by various factors. The Resolution recommended that:

- Immediate and intensive multi-faceted ecological studies be conducted on vultures and birds of prey in the Mara and its environs to better understand species requirements
- As feasible, a grass-roots education and awareness programme be launched at various localities in and around the Mara
- The various stakeholders of the Mara enhance ways to mitigate threats to vultures and ensure their survival.
- The Government of Kenya to assist in protecting vultures and other birds of prey
- Mara stakeholders to participate in funding research on vultures.
- Results of vulture research in and around the Mara to be incorporated into an overall Mara management plan.

Summary results for the July 2002 and January 2003 waterbird counts

(a) Rift Valley Lakes

Wetland	*Date*	*No. Birds*	*No. Species*
Lake Bogoria	*11.01.03*	*92,772*	*28*
	21.07.02	*134,121*	*28*
Lake Nakuru	*12.01.03*	*1,154,117*	*62*
	28.07.02	*778,407*	*46*
Nakuru Sewage Treatment Ponds	*12.01.03*	*4,103*	*43*
	28.07.02	*2,745*	*29*
Lake Elmentaita	*25.01.03*	*49,582*	*53*
Lake Sonachi	*25.01.03*	*611*	*15*
Lake Naivasha	*26.01.03*	*7,474*	*65*
Lake Magadi	*02.02.03*	*33,157*	*35*

(b) Wetlands around Nairobi

Wetland	*Date*	*No. Birds*	*No. Species*
Manguo Floodplains, Limuru	*08.01.03*	*840*	*29*
Limuru Sewage Ponds	*08.01.03*	*295*	*23*
Tigoni Golf Country Club dam	*08.01.03*	*28*	*3*
Dandora Oxidation Ponds	*15.01.03*	*8,790*	*48*
Thika Sewage Ponds	*19.01.03*	*1,759*	*42*
Kenyatta University Sewage Works	*29.01.03*	*115*	*19*
Kahawa Sukari Dam	*29.01.03*	*197*	*22*
Nairobi National Park	*22.01.03*	*94*	*22*
Langata Wetlands (Hillcrest)	*22.01.03*	*101*	*20*

(c) Kenya Coast

Wetland	*Date*	*No. Birds*	*No. Species*
Lake Chemchem	*1.2.03*	*688*	*30*
Mida Creek	*8.2.03*	*4,340*	*12*
Malindi Harbour	*1.2.03*	*1,619*	*27*
Sabaki River Mouth	*2.2.03*	*13,236*	*41*
Kensalt	*2/2/03*	*2,649*	*28*
Tansy's Pool (Forest)	*1.2.03*	*11*	*4*
Kararacha (Forest)	*1.2.03*	*4*	*4*

(d) Lake Victoria Wetlands

Wetlands	*Date*	*No. Birds*	*No. Species*
Sondu Miriu River Mouth	*25.01.03*	*832*	*26*
Nyamware Rice Field	*25.01.03*	*42*	*13*
Kisumu Sewage Ponds	*25.01.03*	*201*	*21*
Impala Park/Dunga Beach	*26.01.03*	*396*	*26*

Monitoring of Waterbirds in Kenya
July 2002 & January 2003 counts

Alfred Owino

Summarised from the Research Reports of the Centre for Biodiversity National Museums of Kenya: Ornithology, 47 (2003)

Overview

In July 2002 and January 2003, 153 volunteers counted waterbirds in Kenyan wetlands as part of the African Waterbird Census (AfWC). A total of 28 wetland sites were covered: Eight in Kenya's southern Rift Valley, nine around Nairobi, seven at the Kenya north coast and four wetlands around Lake Victoria. Results for each wetland are given in table form.

The seven Rift Valley lakes held a combined total of 1,347,738 birds of 86 species in January 2003. As usual, flamingos accounted for over 90% of the total number of waterbirds counted on the Rift Valley lakes. Aerial counts were also conducted at Lakes Elmenteita, Sonachi, Oloidien and Magadi in January 2003, courtesy of the World Conservation Union (IUCN)

Acknowledgements

The waterbird counts are a collaborative effort between the Department of Ornithology (National Museums of Kenya), Nature Kenya, and the Kenya Wildlife Service. The count organisers are very grateful to the volunteers, including members of Important Bird Areas site support groups, and all who contributed in various ways to make the January 2003 waterbird counts a success. The funds for the exercise were provided by the Bird Committee of the East Africa Natural History Society (Nature Kenya), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (UK BirdLife Partner), Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (UK) and Kenya Wildlife Service Wetlands Programme. The count organisers are very grateful to the World Conservation Union (IUCN) for conducting aerial counts at key southern Rift Valley lakes during January 2003, and to A Rocha Kenya and the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya for organising wetlands counts at the north coast and Lake Victoria wetlands

(e) Aerial counts

Wetland	*Date*	*No. Birds*	*Great White Pelican*	*Great Cormorant*	*Greater Flamingo*	*Lesser Flamingo*
Lake Elmentaita	*26.01.03*	*25,580*	*80*		*22,500*	*3,000*
Lake Sonachi	*26.01.03*	*250*				*250*
Lake Oloiden	*26.01.03*	*570*		*400*		*170*
Lake Magadi	*02.02.03*	*6,780*				

respectively. In addition, we thank the landowners around Lake Naivasha for their kind support in offering boats and assisting with various logistics. Our special thanks go to the volunteers for their continued support of the waterbird monitoring programme in Kenya.

Participants in July 2002 and January 2003 waterbirds counts

Antje Ahrends, Jack Amisi, George Amutete, Keven Apidi, Rosemary Bahati, Albert Baya, Dorothea Brass, Paul Buckley, Rose Bwire, Betty Charo, Bernard Chege, Reuben Chege, Raphael Cherops, Musa Cheruiyot, Reuben Cherutich, Ben Chirchir, Franklin Chitwa, Jeff Davis, Douglas Gachucha, Ann Gathitu, Isaac Gathitu, Carol Gatune, Patrick Gichuki, David Gikonyo, David Gitau, Edward Gitau, Polly Goodwin, Elizabeth Hamilton, Narinder Heyer, Geoffrey Howard, Titus Imboma, Wycliffe Ingarah, Colin Jackson, Vicky Jebichii, Rael Juma, George Kagwe, Martin Kahindi, Job Kamanda, Elias Kamande, Dominic Kamau, James Kamau, Norman Kamau, Patrick Kamau, Peter Kamau, Anthony Kangethe, Richard Kanwony, Samuel Kanyongo, Daniel Kariithi, James Kariuki,John Kariuki, Evans Kemboi, Daniel Kariithi, James Kariuki, John Kariuki, Evans Kemboi, Moses Khazalwa, James Kimaru, Lazaras Kimathi, Michael Kimeri, Irene Kinuthia, Moses Kinuthia, Muoki Kioko, Onesmus Kioko, Joab Kiprop, Anthony Kiragu, Lydia Kisoyau, Bernard Kuloba, Anthony Kuria, Elizabeth Kuria, Ben Kyalo, Fredrick Lala, Samson Lokorodi, Dominic Loponu, John Mwakwaka, Maaike Manten, Ruben Marry, Alex Mbiriri, Philip Mechle, Stephen Mihunga, Evans Mkalla, Yumiko Mori, Muchai Muchane, W. Muiruri, Ronald Mulwa, Rufus Murigu, Julius Muriuki, Fabian Musila, John Musina, Sabi Muteshi, Christopher Muteti, Elius Mwachia, Jonathan Mwachongo, John Mwangi, Ogeto Mwebi, Harrison Mwenda, Timothy Mwinami, Nicodemus Nalianya, Kariuki Ndang'ang'a, Peter Nderitu, Robert Ndetei, Charles Ndung'u, Bonface Ng'ang'a, Robert Ng'ang'a,Milka Ngugi, Fleur Ng'weno, Mercy Njeri, Jennifer Njogu, Stella Njuguna, Maurice Naligu, Moses Nyamu, Eva Obingo, John Ochieng, Sam Ogel, Anne Okelo, Mpakany Olevatambo, Alex Oloo, Allai Orimba, Nickson Otieno, Alfred Owino, Shailesh Patel, Labeille Perrine, Spencer Radnich, Charles Rugalas, Alex Sempele, Johnstone Seroney, O. Shah, Itai Shanni, Edai Shanny, Anderson Tuitoek, Alice Vosena, James Wachira, Mike Wairoma, Wanyoike Wamiti, Esther Wangui, Edith Wanjiru, Rose Warigia, Ishmael Waweru, Mark Samuel Abukui, Bernd de Bruijn, Brkit van Dan, Leonard Njoro Githinji, Jesse K. Irungu, Aboala Mohamed Khamis, Philip arap Kirui, Wilson K. Koskei, Sinom Nganda Musila, Rose Njoki Mutero, Joseph W. Muthuru, Joseph Kariuki Mwangi, Francis O. Ogando, Amos Otieno, Marlene Reid, Lispar Wachira, Thomas Kazungu, Anthony B. Wandera.

Marabou by Nani Croze

The 2003-2004 Report will be published in *Kenya Birds* Vol.11 no.2!

Notes on Ruma National Park

Ruma National Park is one of Kenya's 60 Important Bird Areas, and a non-breeding habitat for the threatened Blue Swallow, an intra-African migrant. It is also the only place in Kenya with a viable population of Roan Antelopes.

Ruma NP is in the Lambwe Valley of Nyanza Province, at an altitude of 1200 to 1500 metres above sea level. It is only 40 km from Homa Bay town. The park is mainly savannah grassland, with tall grass, bushes, and acacia and fig trees, and is drained by the Olambe and other rivers. Animals in this park include leopard, hyena, serval cat, giraffe, zebra, buffalo, and antelopes such as roan, topi, reedbuck and oribi. Ruma is infested with tsetse flies and mosquitoes, and this has attracted research organisations, including ICIPE, which have a wide range of research activities in the park.

Poaching for bush meat is a big problem in this park. The local community is engaged in consuming and selling game meat. We were told the meat is taken as far as the Tanzanian border. This is becoming a booming business, and threatening the existence of the park and its wildlife. During our visit to Ruma, we volunteered to remove snares, and we managed to recover more than 30 snares. We were also lucky to see the rare and beautiful Blue Swallow.

Moses Khazalwa wa Amiani
<koribustard2001@yahoo.com>

Allen's Gallinule at Lake Baringo

Visiting Samatian Island in Lake Baringo in August 2003, we saw at least 12 Allen's Gallinules. They were on the eastern shore of the lake, opposite Samatian Island, in reeds that were about two-thirds of a metre tall. We suspect there were many more than the 12 birds we saw, as heads were popping up all the time and they were seen flying from one perch to the next and climbing on to the vegatation as described in Zimmerman et al.

Other interesting sightings in the area: Purple Swamphens, Yellow Crowned Bishops Northern Red Bishops and early Barn Swallows.

Philip & Ros Hechle
Patrick & Karen Plumbe

Roosting Wagtails

On August 4th 2003, I happened to be at the Karen Post Office at 6.40 pm, and was surprised to see large numbers of African Pied Wagtails, approximately 30 to 40, coming in to roost in a single 5-metre high tree growing isolated from any other shrubbery right next to the building. I have not seen African Pied Wagtails roosting communally like this before.

Tony Seth-Smith, Nairobi
<tonyss@africaonline.co.ke>

The time the Storks passed by Olorgesailie

George Eshiamwata <george.eshiamwata@birdlife.or.ke>
Art by Andrew Kamiti

The onset of rains in dry country triggers a drastic change in the habitat, in turn influencing the bird life. The short but heavy rains that pounded different parts of the country in December 2000 - January 2001 did not spare the area around Olorgesailie Prehistoric Site on the Nairobi-Magadi road. To the Maasai herdsmen, this was a great boon, and to the birding fraternity it brought a stunning spectacle.

Storks started streaming in to the flat green plain near the village of Ol Tepessi on January 6. The first arrivals were about eight Abdim's Stork. They were followed by some Black Storks, a large flock of White Storks, then uncountable Marabou Storks and a small number of Woolly-necked Storks. This magnificent influx increased day by day, becoming thousands, with White Storks the most abundant. Flocks of Cattle Egrets and a pair of Grey Crowned Cranes also visited the area.

Each day the storks demonstrated their mastery of the air, a spectacle all in black and white. While some soared overhead, others perched, some landing on the ground with a thud to glean the ground. They seemed to be feeding on fat green caterpillars that had appeared on the fresh and luxuriant vegetation. Other insects in the new green growth ranged from small flies and beetles to grasshoppers.

It was a marvellous sight, and even the local people were amazed; most of them could not remember the last time such a large population of transient birds had made a stopover in their area. Some could not believe that some of the storks, the White Storks, could have come all the way from the northern hemisphere, and I had a chance to tell them the story of bird migration. Equally amazed were birders Shailesh Patel and Bernd de Bruijn,

visitors to Olorgesailie, who informed other bird watchers in Nairobi, who came on 14 January to witness and marvel at this spectacular sight.

It took about three weeks for the last flock to leave, though there still remained a small remnant population of solitary birds. Where they had been, we could see thick mats of the plant *Tribulus terrestris* – an annual plant with bright yellow flowers and spiky seedpods that makes optimal use of the short rains to grow and colonise a place. It hosts many different caterpillar species.

Olorgesailie is an important prehistoric site, about 70 km. south of Nairobi on the Magadi Road, and about 46 km from Magadi. It is famous for the many ancient stone axes found there, and recently, bones of early people have also been found. Olorgesailie is also a popular bird watching site, and 443 bird species have been recorded in the vicinity. It was the site of the study of the Banded Parisoma reported elsewhere in this issue, and you may even see a Banded Parisoma that I ringed with a coloured band as part of that study.

July White Storks and Opportunistic Lanner Falcon

A flock of White Storks, about thirty in all, was seen at the side of the road near a small puddle of water in the Mara Conservancy on July 22, 2003. This was some 15 kilometres to the west of the Mara Serena Lodge, on the main road that runs from Kichwa Tembo, past Mara Serena and on to Keekorok, I am reporting this, as I thought that all migrants had left for Europe before the end of July?

On July 23, 2003, flying in the balloon from Little Governor's Camp, on the plains west of the Mara Serena, a Lanner Falcon dived past the balloon. Our pilot, Elle Kirkman, told us that the Lanner is a frequent visitor to the flying balloon. When the balloon flies low over the ground, the spurfowl and francolins are disturbed, and as they fly up, the Lanner takes the opportunity to make a kill. Just amazing how a wild creature can utilize man's noisy machinery to its advantage.

Grete Davey, Athi River

Comment: In the Middle East, White Storks are known to start moving away from their breeding sites as early as late July, but to see a group in East Africa in July is something different. There is a possibility that a bird might over-summer in Africa, but a group of 30 is not a lone bird…

From my experience, it is not unusual to see a pair of Lanner Falcons hunting, one doing the chasing and the other surprising the prey (like some big cats). So in an area where a hot-air balloon is doing the chasing, one individual can do the surprising.

Itai Shanni, Bird Committee

Mystery Bird Photo Challenge # 1 Solution

by Itai Shanni *Photos and introduction on inside back cover*

Bird # 1

The bird shows a strong insectivore bill – partly shadowed by a branch above the bird, which causes some confusion. This bird has a rust-coloured top of the head and an overall greyish back with some dark streaking, and a short tail (a bit hard to see from this angle).

This combination of features (especially the bill) immediately rules out all seedeaters (weavers, sparrows, buntings and most larks), and leaves us with the more slender LBJ's (Little Brown Jobs): pipits, or cisticolas and other warblers.

The rusty colour of the head that contrasts with the grey, black-streaked back, rules out pipits, limiting us down to warblers. Of all the species of warblers found in Kenya (other than cisticolas), only two have this patterned back. The Sedge Warbler has a dark cap and very strong white supercilium (thus ruled out); and the very rare vagrant Grasshopper Warbler has a slim build and narrowly streaked undertail-coverts (obviously missing in our bird). So we are left with only the cisticolas.

A combination of rusty head and streaked back brings us into the group of Winding, Carruthers's, Levaillant's, Croaking, Rattling and Stout Cisticolas. Both Croaking and Rattling are ruled out as these are usually very streaked on their heads and show less contrast between head and back (Rattling also has a more greyish appearance). Levaillant's Cisticola is slimmer and more heavily streaked on its back.

Down to three species, check the bill size and shape, wing colouration and habitat. Stout Cisticola has a streaked forehead and bright rufous nape, while both Winding and Carruthers's have a plain rusty head (except for juveniles, which also have streaked crowns, but yellow throats and underparts). However, in our photo the shadow of the branch makes it very difficult to see how streaked (or unstreaked) the forehead is.

Both Winding and Carruthers's are usually best defined by their very strong rufous wing panel (more brownish in Carruthers's and less striking in the coastal subspecies of Winding). The bill size of these two species is usually slender, as is their overall appearance, and they will usually be in a wet swampy habitat.

In our bird, the lack of rufous wing panel is obvious but can be caused by the angle and light (though some of it should still be visible). However, the very strong, stout bill (that made some

of our readers think that this might be a weaver or a sparrow) is clear.

The size is hard to assess, but it is a comparatively stocky, heavy headed Cisticola. The bird sits on a species of Acacia tree that is more likely to be in a dry habitat, but of course cannot be a leading clue to identification. The rufous crown and nape, combined with the streaked back and bulky appearance, together with the lack of any obvious rufous wing panel, makes this bird a **Stout Cisticola.**

From all answers that we received, 43% identified this bird correctly as a Stout Cisticola (photographed at Nairobi National Park 5th March 03 by Itai Shanni).

Bird # 2

In contrast to bird #1, in this case it is quite obvious that the bird pictured is a Hornbill. The big size (assessed by comparing to the figs in front of the bird), short legs, black and white colouration, long tail, some signs of the bill (just the lower mandible can be seen) and the upright posture, all together give this bird the 'jizz' of a Hornbill. What is left is to define which Hornbill it is!

Hornbills can be categorised into four major groups regarding their habitat: Dryland, Woodland, Forest and Ground. A fruiting Fig Tree can be a major attraction, so the habitat in this case cannot be a leading factor for identification, except for the ground species, which are ruled out. Since the bill shape and colour are not very obvious in this photo, another very important feature in identification of hornbills is out.

We are left with main body colour, tail pattern and some head markings. Our bird has a mainly black body with some white on the under-wing coverts and some white on the primaries. The tail seems to have an extended white tip, a broad black band and some white under-tail feathers.

The combination of these features leads us into a group of four species: Trumpeter, Silvery-cheeked, Black-and-white-casqued and White-thighed Hornbills.

Trumpeter has a black tail with a narrow white terminal band. It also has a black throat and upper breast clearly separated from the white lower breast and belly, and is therefore ruled out. This body colouration is also true for the White-thighed Hornbill, which has an all-white tail with a narrow black central band, and in any case does not occur in Kenya.

We are left with two: Silvery-cheeked and Black-and-white-casqued Hornbills. Both have a similar tail pattern and some silvery markings on the cheek (probably the biggest pitfall in this photo). The white under-wing coverts that are shown in this photo could appear in either species when perched and so cannot be used as a field mark. This leaves us with the one very distinct difference between the two: the white colour of the primaries of the Black-and-white-casqued Hornbill, which are black in the Silvery-cheeked Hornbill.

This bird was correctly identified as a **Black-and-white-casqued Hornbill** by 86%. (It was photographed at Kakamega Forest 19th January 03 by Itai Shanni).

Bird # 3

It is very clear that this is a Sunbird of some kind – the bright iridescent colours and behaviour of probing flowers are some of the most important features of this family. The medium size (compared with the *Leonotis* flower head) and the long central tail feathers can give some clues for the grouping of this bird inside the family.

Since most sunbirds show distinct sexual dimorphism (where, with some exceptions, females are dull with little or no iridescent colours), it is likely that our bird is a male. The age is not yet clear.

Here in Kenya, nine species of sunbirds have long central tail feathers. The big species, Bronze, Golden-winged, Tacazze, Malachite and Scarlet-tufted Malachite, usually occupy gardens, forests and forest edge, and alpine moorlands respectively. Three medium sized – Black-bellied, Beautiful and Red-chested –occupy drylands and wetlands respectively. The small Pygmy Sunbird lives in the semi-arid habitat of northwest Kenya.

The two Malachite species have a glossier green upper-side and the elongated tail feathers are usually looser and longer. The Golden-winged Sunbird has yellow coloured central tail feathers and can also be ruled out. The Pygmy Sunbird is green and yellow and is much smaller, with much longer central tail feathers. It also occupies a semi-arid habitat where one would not expect to find the *Leonotis* flowering.

Adult Bronze and Tacazze Sunbirds have much longer central-tail feathers which rules them out. The immature males of these species will usually have less iridescence (more greyish and female type patterns) on the head. Bronze Sunbirds have a greener sheen on the head than the blue sheen in the photo.

We are left with three very similar species: Red-chested, Black-bellied and Beautiful Sunbirds. Now it is time for 'jizz' again. Both of the dryland species seem to be more greenish in the field (especially on their heads).

The Red-chested Sunbird is described as "brilliant iridescent blue-green above..." compared with the "bright iridescent green" and "glittering green" mentioned for Black-bellied and Beautiful respectively in Zimmerman *et al*, 1996. The bulkier appearance of the tail in the photo also fits Red-chested Sunbird better than the much slimmer-tailed dryland species.

From all answers that we received, 57% identified this bird correctly as a **Red-chested Sunbird** (this adult male was photographed at the Nzoia River in Western Kenya on the 21st January 03 by Itai Shanni).

We urge all of you out there to take part in the second Mystery Bird Challenge! Remember that in order to learn (and win) from this challenge, one should not just look at the plates, but also read the texts and distribution maps in the different field guides. It is always much easier to identify a bird in the field then seeing it in a photo, out of its context (light, habitat, behaviour, call...) but this may be a good way to sharpen your techniques.

Mystery Bird Photo Challenge # 1 Solution

by Itai Shanni

Only one person, **Muoki Kioko**, identified all three species correctly in the Mystery Bird Photo Challenge in *Kenya Birds* volume 10. As a result, we are closing this first competition with Muoki Kioko as the winner. Four other readers identified 2 out of the 3 species correctly, these are: Joseph Kariuki, Jairus N. Koki, F. Alexander and Wendy Stanley.

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Mystery Bird Photo Challenge #2

What birds are these? Identify them all and win a prize!

Your answer must include:

1. *The bird's English name*
2. *The bird's scientific name*
3. *The number on the photo*

Send your answer to:
<office@naturekenya.org>
or Nature Kenya, PO Box 44486 GPO, 00100 Nairobi
clearly marked "Mystery Bird Photo Challenge".
All entries must be received by the end of March 2005.
Prize: Set of 3 checklists, and winner's name in the next ***Kenya Birds***

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